

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE  
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**TESTIMONY OF THE OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE  
COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN, TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021**

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Senator Seminara, Representative Dauphinais, and all distinguished members of the Committee on Children, this testimony is being submitted on behalf of the Office of the Child Advocate (“OCA”) in support of the following Bills. The obligations of the OCA are to review, investigate, and make recommendations regarding how our publicly funded state and local systems meet the needs of vulnerable children.

**S.B. No. 929 AN ACT EXPANDING SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS TO ALL STUDENTS.**

OCA strongly supports Senate Bill 929 which would ensure that all children, including thousands of children whose families are struggling financially and living paycheck to paycheck can access the food and nutrition that they need without stigmatization and shaming.

**According to Feeding America, 1 in 6 children in Connecticut struggles with hunger, and food banks continue to report that they**

According to testimony from Connecticut FOODSHARE, “[n]early 92,000 children, or 12.6%, in Connecticut are food insecure with thousands more in households that are just getting by. Of those 92,000 children, 25% of them do not qualify for government assistance.”

There are few sounder public policies than ensuring children have enough to eat and that they may not be shamed due to their families’ lack of funds to pay for food. That so many children continue to be hungry in our communities, and in this country, is a terrible and inexcusable travesty. That any child would be shamed for lack of funds to buy lunch or denied a hot lunch, whether privately or publicly, further exacerbates the tragedy of childhood and family hunger. This bill is a deliberate and important effort to address one aspect of childhood hunger, which has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Certain children, particularly those that are undocumented or whose parents are undocumented, or are ineligible for certain supports, may avoid accessing food supports for fear of being deported or later being denied a green card. Particularly now, with all of the burdens children must bear, this bill is essential. I hope its passage is unanimous and swift.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Eagan, JD, Child Advocate, State of Connecticut